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DE RUEHPU #1174 1861620
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FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6441
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 1580
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 1399
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC PRIORITY 0842
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1253

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STATE FOR WHA/EX AND WHA/CAR
S/CRS
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR
INR/IAA
WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: POSTCARD FROM GONAIVES

11. Summary. Gonaives, the capital city of Haiti's Artibonite department, is Haiti's third largest city with a population of roughly 100,000. During a May 29-31 trip, Poloff found the city still coping with the aftermath of flooding in 2004. Gonaives, in which the GoH has a very weak presence, lacks infrastructure, basic services, and economic vitality. Civil society representatives emphasized that U.S. technical assistance was needed in lieu of brick and mortar projects. End summary.

12. Since Gonaives has no airport, Poloff traveled to Gonaives by vehicle. The 115 mile drive from Port-au-Prince to Gonaives took approximately three and a half hours due to poor road conditions. The section of National Highway One between Saint Marc and Gonaives is especially challenging. Long stretches are not paved at all while car-sized potholes scar the paved sections. The road between Saint Marc and Gonaives also tends to flood quickly during the rainy season. The GoH is attempting to address the flooding problem in the valley between Saint Marc and Gonaives by construction of an (unfinished) elevated roadway.

13. Drainage and electricity are Gonaives' most visible problems. As in the case for this visit, even light rains caused the city streets to flood, giving the city the appearance that it never fully recovered from the floods of 2004 despite over \$40 million in humanitarian and other assistance from the USG and project assistance from other donors. There was standing water and mud in many of the streets. Some streets were impassable due to mud and debris. Not only were Gonaives' streets flooded, so were many of the buildings. In one building, Poloff could observe from the second floor balcony fish swimming in the flooded courtyard below. Residents told Poloff that a light rain was the source of the water and mud on the streets.

14. Gonaives receives on average, two hours of electricity per day from the public utility. Venezuela has proposed building a 15 megawatt plant, though according to Mayor Stephen Moise, Gonaives only needs between 6-8 megawatts of electricity. There are no other plans to provide electricity to Gonaives if the Venezuelans fail to honor their commitment. With virtually no GoH or municipal services available, Gonaives depends on NGOs, including MINUSTAH, for basic services such as health care, education, water, food distribution, and development project management.

¶15. Violence-plagued Gonaives has only two police stations and no prisons. Deputy Commissaire Ernst Dorfeuille noted that his 26 police officers and 15 riot police officers were straining to meet the demands of the latest crackdown on the gangs, though he readily admitted to MINUSTAH's helpfulness. The HNP's having only two patrol vehicles compounded the strain on the officers.

¶16. Gonaives is devoid of signs of economic vitality. The city has three hotels, but apparently no other storefront enterprises or restaurants. Commerce transpires outside house fronts or intermittently on the street. The International Organization for Migration is currently rehabilitating a central marketplace by the waterfront, which could facilitate the formation of a central shopping district once it is completed. Poloff did observe agricultural activity outside the city limits.

¶17. Comment. Even though Gonaives faces severe developmental challenges, Poloff's interlocutors hope that Gonaives will improve with technical, rather than financial, assistance. Specifically, civil society representatives noted that an agricultural extension and vocational/technical training would benefit the residents of Gonaives and the surrounding areas most. These persons also believed that the economic development that Gonaives needs should focus on developing project/business management skills rather than trying to make Gonaives industrially competitive. End comment.
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